



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veteran Connection

VA Portland Health Care System Newsletter

Keeping the Promise - Advancing Excellence



VA Portland Health Care System

3710 SW U.S. Veterans Hospital Rd.
Portland, OR 97239
503-220-8262 | 800-949-1004

Produced by the VAPORHCS
Public Affairs Office

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??

Please email us at...

VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov

or call 503-402-2975

Lincoln's Promise (VA Mission)

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

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For VAPORHCS Events and

Classes—got to the VAPORHCS

Web page...

www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp

Message from the Director



Darwin G. Goodspeed

Director, VA Portland
Health Care System

During these unprecedented times, writing my quarterly greetings for the newsletter has a very different feel. First and foremost, your VA is open and seeing our Veterans every day. Much of our care is virtual using telephone visits or video telehealth, but face-to-face care is still occurring. We are still doing surgeries and procedures that cannot wait and our Emergency Department is open 24/7 seeing Veterans every day. If you are not feeling well, please reach out to your primary care team. Use of secure messaging in [MyHealtheVet](#) is at an all time high. This is a great way to connect. You can also use the telephone numbers you have always used to reach your primary care team (503-220-8262, opn. 2). Similarly, this works for those needing to connect with their [mental health](#) provider (existing patients, call 503-273-5058, choose the clinic; new Mental Health appointments, call 503-220-8262, ext. 56409). We have really expanded our [virtual capabilities](#) and we now have regular mental health groups that are connecting using Veteran Video Connect (VVC). We have also implemented [curb side pharmacy service](#) so you do not need to come into the facility to pickup a prescription. As always, we prefer to do all medications by mail, but that is not always possible. In those times you need to come in, we are providing curbside service to limit your exposure to others and to expedite your receipt of necessary



Choose VA

medication. We are also asking all who need to come to any of our locations of care to wear a mask or other face covering. This is to protect you, your caregivers and our staff. Your considerations of this is greatly appreciated.

So now what? As we plan to resume regular services, we are being very

cautious. Beginning in the second week in May, we will be increasing the number of surgeries and procedures we are performing. Those in most need will be scheduled first and we will slowly increase volumes. If you are scheduled for surgery or a procedure, you may be asked to come in about 48 hours prior to your procedure for COVID-19 testing. We are going to continue inpatient visitor restrictions at the Community Living Center (CLC) in Vancouver as well. We are looking at how to best open all sights of care so we can ensure social distancing and keep everyone safe. Your clinics may look a little different as we explore options to spread folks out a little. We are going to encourage people not to congregate in waiting rooms, canteen and coffee shop areas. We will continue to encourage masks. If you develop any symptoms of infection with COVID-19, do not come in. Call your primary care provider and they will do an assessment and determine the best plan of action.

Thank you all for your support and understanding. Our number one goal is your health and safety. Please be patient as we all adjust to our new reality.

Darwin Goodspeed

May 2020

Volume 7, Issue 2

VAPORHCS begins “Masks On” policy for all patients & staff in VAPORHCS buildings effective May 4, 2020

[Please share
via Facebook](#)



[Please share
via www](#)

Why should we all wear masks?

According to the CDC, in light of new data about how COVID-19 spreads, along with evidence of widespread COVID-19 illness in communities across the country, CDC recommends that people wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in the community setting. This is to protect people around you if you are infected but do not have symptoms.

As care gradually resumes at VAPORHCS, more staff and patients will be present. This makes physical distancing challenging, which could result in asymptomatic spread.

What does this mean for patients here for appointments?

- Outpatients, if not already wearing a mask, should be offered a cloth or paper mask and asked to wear it while present in VAPORHCS settings. Veterans can keep the mask for reuse in the community.
 - We understand that there will be some patients who will not be able to tolerate wearing a mask; staff providing direct care to these patients will wear appropriate personal protection equipment accordingly.
- Thank you for your support in the new mask policy; your assistance will help keep your fellow Veterans and VA staff and everyone's loved ones safer.

For more information go to... <https://www.cdc.gov/.../prevent-get.../cloth-face-cover-faq.html>



PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK

Public servants are on the front lines guarding our national security, curing diseases, caring for veterans and providing important services to the American people. Since the founding of our country, public employees have worked to ensure that our government is the best in the world. Take time during Public Service Recognition Week, May 3-9, to honor our unsung heroes for their dedication.

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Dan
ED Intern
Tech in Bron
on temp assign
US Army 1993-20

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Steve Gable
Material Handler
Supply Chain Mgt.
US Army Veteran

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Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

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VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Pat Strelecki
Imaging Technologist
US Army 1986-91

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Edward Eichelsdoerfer
Physical Therapy
Chronic Pain Specialist

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Laura Simmons
Chaplain Fellow in
Palliative Care

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Toni Boudreault
USAF '83-'92
Dwayne Waller
USAF '83-'05
Joshua Bruckmiller
USA '08-'14

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Carol Pfeifle & Bailey Johnson
Support Services in the
Medical Laboratory

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Kendric Barberis
16 years at VA Portland
Andrew Hill
US Army 1974-80
Both are Food Service
Ambassadors

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

HEALTHCARE HEROES WORK HERE!

VA Portland Health Care System

Thank You

Drew Vanderbilt
USMC '05-'13
David Planton
Veterans Canteen Service
Cooks

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

Waging War on Hepatitis C

VA Portland Cures Thousands of Veterans

By Anna Robaton-Winthrop
VA Portland Public Affairs Volunteer

In 2004, Army Veteran Chris Mumford got alarming news. During an emergency-room visit for a lung infection, he tested positive for hepatitis C — a viral infection that can lead to advanced liver disease, liver cancer and early death.

To make matters worse, Mumford later learned that he wasn't a candidate for the drugs that were used by the Veterans Health Administration to treat the disease in the early 2000s.

So, imagine his surprise, when in 2016 — a decade after learning that he had hepatitis C — Mumford received a letter from the VA letting him know that help was within reach.

"I was elated," says Mumford, recalling his reaction when he learned that treatment through the VA had become an option for him.

Today, Mumford of the Dalles, Ore., is one of more than 100,000 Veterans who have been cured of hepatitis C by the VA. The VA Portland Health Care System (VAPORHCS) alone cured more than 95 percent of infected Veterans within its population (nearly 2,200 people) between fiscal 2015 and 2019. During that period, it also screened nearly 40,000 Veterans at high risk for the disease who previously hadn't been tested.

More than 3 million people in the U.S. are living with chronic hepatitis C, many of them Veterans. Just a few years ago, the prevalence of hepatitis C among Veterans was three times greater than that of the general U.S. population.

Many people infected with hepatitis C don't know it — as was once the case for Mumford. The blood-borne virus often doesn't have obvious symptoms until the onset of long-term complications.

What changed between the time Mumford was diagnosed with hepatitis C and treated for it? Quite a lot.

In early 2014, highly effective, all-oral, direct-acting antivirals became available for hepatitis C treatment. The drugs have few (and relatively mild) side effects, are taken in pill form for about eight to 12 weeks and have cure rates approaching 100 percent for patients without significant liver damage.

Earlier treatments for hepatitis C were taken for much-longer periods (typically 48 weeks) and often had debilitating side effects — not to mention cure rates of just 27 percent within the VA and about 35 percent externally. The VA adopted use of direct-acting antivirals within days of their federal approval.

That wasn't the only game-changer. Congress also allocated some \$2.5 billion for hepatitis C care within the VA. The funding helped cover the cost of direct-acting antivirals and manpower to fight the disease, which meant that VAPORHCS no longer had to prioritize the sickest Veterans for treatment of hepatitis C, says Long Do, a pharmacist



Army Veteran Chris Mumford; in 2016, a decade after learning that he had hepatitis C, Mumford received a letter from the VA letting him know he could be cured. Pictured here is him in his service uniform and photos of him with his all-Veteran band, called "Got Your Six."

Waging War on Hepatitis C (Con't from previous page)

who is part of the hepatitis C team at VAPORHCS's liver clinic.

"Many of the Veterans we've treated are appreciative of us getting rid of a disease that they thought they'd be living with for life, or didn't even know they had," says Do, who has worked with his colleagues to lower barriers to hepatitis C care for Veterans served by VAPORHCS, many of whom live in remote areas.

Rather than asking Veterans to travel long distances for treatment, Do and his colleagues have taken their services on the road, traveling to VAPORHCS facilities across Oregon and in Southwest Washington to provide the kind of care that was once only available at the Portland VA Medical Center.

The team has also worked closely with VA mental health providers and programs serving Veterans who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or struggling with substance-abuse issues. In some instances, team members have delivered medications to Veterans who faced difficulties picking up prescriptions themselves.

"The objective has been to meet Veterans in the community, get their needs met and get them linked to care," says Kari Stevens, a social worker on the hepatitis C team who has forged connections to high-risk Veteran populations, including homeless Veterans and those with substance-abuse issues.

For many Veterans, taking time off work for clinic visits or traveling long distances for care poses a hardship — which is why VAPORHCS's hepatitis C team has also treated Veterans over the phone (after an initial in-person visit to a clinic) or via [telehealth services](#). In fact, the team has come to view treating hepatitis C much like treating a routine, tooth infection, given that most people tolerate direct-acting antivirals well.

"We've treated thousands of Veterans, so we have a really good handle on what we need to do to treat them safely and effectively," says Dana Smothers, a hepatology nurse care coordinator who leads VAPORHCS's hepatitis C treatment campaign.

While he still has health issues, Mumford also has one less thing to worry about these days.

"I can't say that hepatitis C ever really caused me a problem, but my doctors were more concerned about what it might do to my liver eventually," says Mumford, part of an all-Veteran band, called "Got Your Six," that supports Veterans' causes.

He urges fellow Veterans who haven't been tested for hep C not to wait, especially since treatment options have come a long way.

"Go find out, if you haven't been checked. The treatment is not hard to do," says Mumford.

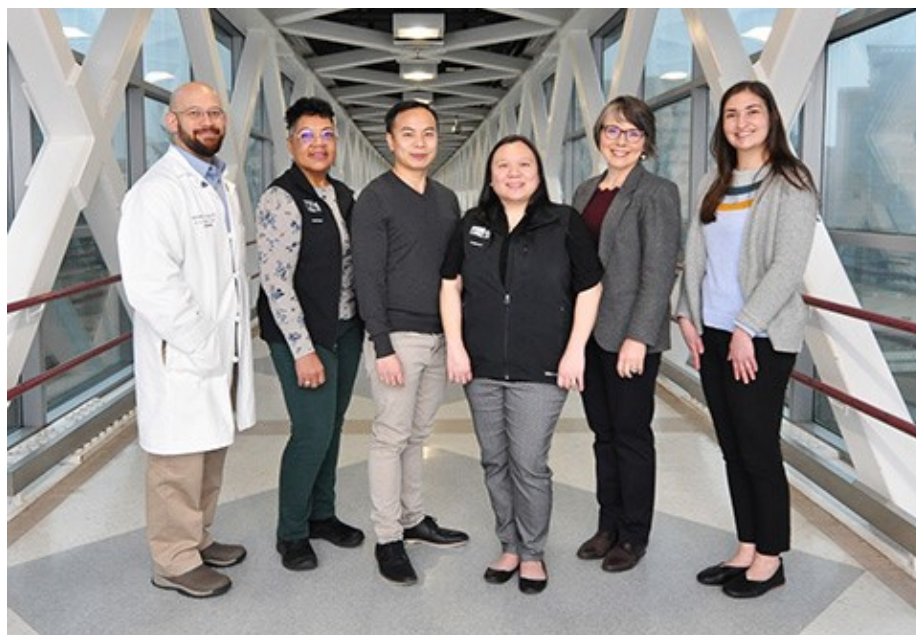


Photo of the VA Portland Hepatitis C Team; Michael Chang, MD, Section Chief of GI & Hepatology; Theresa Taylor-Libby, Family Nurse Practitioner; Long Do, Pharmacist; RoseMarie Trang, Clinic Facilitator; Dana Smothers, RN Care Coordinator; Kari Stevens, Social Work Program Coordinator .

For more information on viral hepatitis and liver disease as well as other resources visit: <https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

-VAPORHCS-

VA Portland Health Care System is continuing to offer Mental Health services with non-face-to-face care.

Please reach out if you need assistance during this time:

- **For new Mental Health appointments**, call 503-220-8262, ext. 56409.
- **For existing patients**, call 503-273-5058, choose the clinic where you receive care.
- **If you are in crisis**, please reach out to the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-9255 and press 1. You may also present to the VA or nearest Emergency Department in your area.

Taking good care of ourselves is especially important right now, please review the following recommendations:

Maintaining and Enhancing Your Mental Health and Well-Being During the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak.

Adapted from <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/>

Taking care of your well-being, including your mental health, is essential during this time. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Many people may experience stress, fear, anxiety, or feelings of depression. This is normal. There are things that you can do to manage your stress and anxiety:

Exercise regularly, try to eat well-balanced meals, and [get plenty of sleep](#).

- Limit alcohol.

Practice breathing exercises and/or meditation. VA has many [free mental health apps for Veterans](#).

- Take breaks from the news (see below for tips).
- Stay connected with others while practicing social distancing (see below for tips).
- Participate in activities or hobbies that you enjoy, or learn a new one.
- Keep your current mental health appointments. VA offers both video and phone telemental health options that do not require you to go to your closest facility in-person should you have a medical concern or need to follow specific social distancing guidelines in your community.
- Learn ways to connect with VA providers using telehealth options and [schedule or reschedule your appointment online](#). If you are requesting a new mental health appointment, please call the VA Portland Health Care System and we will work to arrange an appointment for you. If you need same day access for mental health services, call the VA Portland Health Care System to request this and you will be connected to care.



The VAPORHCS Mental Health Team is here to help you, our Veterans, with your mental health needs. For new or existing patients, please reach out if you need assistance. Details are in the link below.

(Continued on next page)

VA Portland Mental Health Services (Con't from previous page)

Also, see these great resources on managing stress and anxiety related to COVID-19:

- [Moving Forward](#)
- [National Center for PTSD Guidance on Managing Stress](#)
- [CDC Guidance on COVID19 Mental Health Support](#)



Avoid Too Much Exposure to News

Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. If you feel anxious or stressed from the information, struggle to turn off the TV or log off of social media, or [have trouble sleeping](#), you might want to limit the amount and type of news you are viewing. Try to do enjoyable activities, return to normal life as much as possible, and check for updates between breaks.

Stay Connected

During times of social distancing, it is normal to have increased feelings of loneliness, sadness, fear, or anxiety. It is important for everyone to stay connected. Here are some ways to feel more connected:

- Seek support from family, friends, mentors, clergy, and those who are in similar circumstances. While face-to-face communication may be difficult, be flexible and creative using phone, email, text messaging, and video calls. Sign up or join a virtual social network that includes service members and Veterans.
- Keep in touch with fellow Veterans and assist them in navigating this new environment if they are having a hard time. Teach them how to use VA Video Connect through the [VA mobile app store](#) as VA increases virtual health and mental health appointment availability.
- As a Veteran, you have been uniquely trained in emergency response situations. Your resilience and strength can assist others during these times. Connection can also happen when you give back to your community by sharing your expertise and support with family, friends, and neighbors through acts of kindness and volunteer opportunities which will arise.

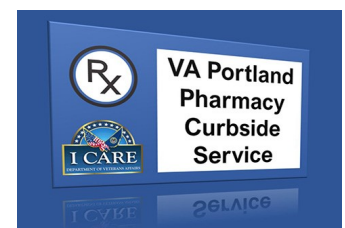
-VAPORHCS-

RX curb-side pick-up available at Portland VA Medical Center & Vancouver VA Campus

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and for the safety of our Veterans and hospital staff, VAPORHCS is minimizing all unnecessary foot traffic in-patient care areas including the Outpatient Pharmacies in Portland and Vancouver.

The Outpatient Pharmacies in Portland and Vancouver will NO longer refill prescriptions for pick up at the window.

For urgent refills like antibiotics or pain medications, the VA Portland Medical Center is now opening an outside curbside pick-up station. ([Click HERE for all the details.](#))



Pharmacy Curbside Pick Up Hours at PVAMC and Vancouver Campus: Monday to Friday : 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Sign up to get email alerts on all things VA Portland!

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